

REASON EIGHT

By Brian Staker

The Exhilarating Life Utah Travel & Tourism



Ron Brown

GREAT SALT LAKE SHORELANDS PRESERVE VISITOR CENTER

EXPLORERS, ADVENTURERS AND WANDERERS have long been attracted by the incredible diversity of Utah's natural beauty. The first time Major John Wesley Powell encountered Zion National Park he exclaimed, "To describe it would be a task equal in magnitude to that of describing the stars of the heavens." Over a century later, Edward Abbey said, "For the first time, I felt I was getting close to the West of my deepest imaginings, the place where the tangible and the mythical became the same." Such is the spellbinding power of Utah's geology, recreation and natural beauty.

Utah captivates the knowing traveler with glens and gorges, deeply etched sandstone and soaring peaks, dense forests, lush river valleys and dramatic plateaus. With 42 state parks, six national forests, seven national monuments, five national parks, 13 ski areas, hundreds of lakes and streams, and countless other natural and recreational attractions, Utah has every imaginable form of scenic showpiece.

DID SOMEONE SAY 'FAT TIRE?'

To a lot of people, the once-obscure town of Moab is virtually synonymous with mountain biking. This southeastern biking mecca has been attracting hundreds of thousands of enthusiastic off-road riders since the early '80s. Popular because of its unique red rock landscape, challenging trails and intense dedication to the sport, Moab has rides for everyone—from the seasoned veteran to the uninitiated enthusiast. It even has its own Fat Tire Festival each October.

"When you compare Utah with other states, we lead the nation in out-of-state cycling visitors each year," says Rod Oelerich, publisher of *Outdoor Utah*, an annual travel guide distributed in the Western states. "Utah has become a cycling destination that has something for everyone."

Moab isn't dedicated solely to the fat tire variety of cycling; each March the town hosts its own Skinny Tire Festival—an event that features large

group tours along the Colorado River, climbs through Dead Horse Point State Park and a tour through Arches National Park.

In the summer, hundreds of miles of trails in Utah's Wasatch Mountains are only minutes from towns along the Wasatch Front. Biking, hiking and camping are available in Millcreek, Big Cottonwood, Emigration, Little Cottonwood and American Fork Canyons, and a score of other canyons from Brigham City to Payson.

One of the more unsung but popular cycling arenas is the winter haven Park City. Known predominately for its world-class skiing, the former mining-town-turned-chic-mountain village has recently transformed its resort terrain into a series of interconnecting mountain bike trails that would take a month of Sundays to navigate. The transformation is a testament to a small group of intrepid local bikers and illustrates how important Utah's outdoors is to its people. Other bike trails have been developed in many of the state's skiing areas, allowing the resorts to

make use of the mountain side year round.

And it's not just for locals anymore: the 2006 USA Cycling National Mountain Bike Series will hold stages in Deer Valley and Brian Head.

HOOFING ABOUT

Early Utah settlers had to make their way across the vast expanses of the state largely by foot. And the words "Utah" and "Uinta" are said to come from a Ute Indian word meaning "people of the mountains." Popular lore aside, the phrase makes sense when you look around the state. And when it comes to hiking, resolute foot soldiers will find Utah offers an astonishing array of trails and terrain.

Running east to west from the eastern edge of the state to Slat Lake, the Uinta Mountains are remarkable because of their height (the area above timberline exceeds that of any other mountain range in the lower 48), with trails rarely dipping below the 9,000-foot mark. Routes in the Uintas can range from two-to-three-mile jaunts to 60+-mile treks along

the ridge tops of this backpacker's paradise.

"To many, the Wasatch Range is synonymous with Utah's famous powder skiing," says Oelerich. "But when winter snow recedes, the range becomes the most visited hiking destination in the state."

For those who live along the Wasatch Front, it's almost too easy to access trails with breathtaking terrain virtually right outside their backdoors. One of the most popular scenic trails is found around Mount Timpanogos, which overlooks Utah and Salt Lake counties. Towering peaks, an emerald lake, a lingering glacier, alpine meadows and waterfalls along the route make this an Eden to photographers and hikers.

If you are questing for something besides Alpine scenery, then traverse a little farther south to the Colorado Plateau—Utah's most famous geological province. Massive sandstone formations draw millions of visitors yearly and house all five of Utah's national parks: Zion, Bryce, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands and Arches.

"Thousands of miles of formal

and informal trails exist in the twisting red rock of Southern Utah," says Oelerich. "Add the San Rafael Swell and the Grand Staircase National Monument to the mix of national parks, and you've got an outdoor playground that puts entire countries to shame."

Calf Creek and Coyote Gulch have long been considered gems of the Grand Staircase-Escalante. However, with a little exploring and a good guidebook, you'll find hundreds of other hikes in the Plateau region featuring brilliant waterfalls, Indian pictographs and sandstone arches.

ENJOY THE LAKE EFFECT

"That we have the greatest snow on earth is scientifically proven," maintains Leigh von der Esch, director of the Utah Office of Tourism. "The unique chemistry and meteorological conditions of our area make for the white, fluffy stuff skiers and snowboarders crave and travel from around the world to experience."

"Ski magazine named Deer Valley the number one resort in the country,

and *Skiing* magazine tagged Snowbird and Alta as the best one-two resort combination in the U.S. for the fourth year in a row," adds Kim McClelland, chair of the Utah Board of Tourism Development. "You know with some of the competition out there that we have something really remarkable."

Long after the Olympic torch from the 2002 Winter Games has faded, Utah has capitalized on the Olympic venues—Soldier Hollow, the Olympic Skating Oval and the Utah Olympic Park—to entice outside visitors and provide training grounds for competitive athletes and a great resource for our community.



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publisher of *Outdoor Utah*

You could find similar activities elsewhere, but from major metropolitan centers it would take hours instead of minutes to arrive there. "The accessibility of all these activities is what makes Utah stand out," maintains von der Esch.

WATER RECREATION

Skiing, hiking and biking often get all the attention when it comes to Utah's outdoor recreation, but there's potential for every kind of recreation in the Beehive State.

If you yearn to put down stakes, Utah has hundreds of public campgrounds scattered from St. George to Logan. The Uinta and Boulder mountains alone have more than 2,000 lakes and streams to fish and more than enough campgrounds to accommodate travelers.

Visitors from around the country travel to blue-ribbon trout streams: the Green and Provo Rivers. And if fly angling doesn't float your boat, you can float your own for walleye at Lake Powell and trout at Strawberry Reservoir, just for starters.

River rats have long revered the

muscular Colorado as one of the premier places to float a rubber raft. Dozens of guide services take various trips down the Colorado every summer, as well as shorter trips on the Green, San Juan or the Yampa rivers. You can also find world-class kayaking throughout the state.

If you'd rather ski on water than snow, Utah has one of the greatest destinations in the world—Lake Powell. Created by the Glen Canyon Dam, Lake Powell boasts glisteningly clear waterskiing conditions in a setting of classic crimson cliffs. With thousands of miles of shoreline and hundreds of tight, secluded canyons, Lake Powell provides unparalleled solitude and skiing.

GETTING OUT

Access to superb climbing has recently put Utah on the outdoor recreation map as well. With classic granite climbs in Little Cottonwood Canyon, unique rock formations in Maples Canyon, a range of routes in Logan Canyon and the imposing multi-day routes in Moab and Zion National Park, Utah's terrain is as varied and

challenging as any you'll find.

Even more recreational opportunities open up when you look beyond those that most immediately come to mind. The Great Salt Lake Shorelands Preserve Visitor Center at Farmington Bay, about 30 minutes north of downtown Salt Lake City, is an excellent site for bird watching. Utah has some of the most reasonable greens fees and more first class golf courses than you can shake your putter at.

You could take an entire day exploring the natural wonders of Antelope Island in the Great Salt Lake, the largest inland salt water lake in North America. Elsewhere, Dinosaur National Monument in Vernal offers its fossil record for those in search of natural history.

For being so easy on the eyes, perhaps the most surprising thing about Utah is that it is far more than meets the eye once you dig deeper. You can take virtually any of the state's highways and byways and encounter nature's bounty. "Whether on the road less traveled or the well-paved path, it's all there waiting for you," says von der Esch.



SNOWBIRD



DEER VALLEY AND HISTORIC MAIN STREET IN PARK CITY.

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Utah Board of Tourism
Development



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